

VZCZCXRO7300
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #1180/01 1361600
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 161600Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2134
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001180

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AKP CONTINUES TO PUSH DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION

REF: ANKARA 1139 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Unable to elect FM Abdullah Gul president through the existing parliamentary election process because of the newly enunciated quorum requirement, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has pushed through parliament a package of controversial constitutional amendments that would introduce direct presidential elections in Turkey. The package would also change the parliament's and president's terms of office and clarify the constitution's quorum requirement (reftels). President Sezer has until May 25 to act and is widely expected to veto the changes, PM Erdogan has vowed to keep parliament in session to re-approve the package and bounce it back to Sezer, who may then submit the amendments to referendum.

¶2. (C) Summary/comment cont'd. AKP's goal is to hold the referendum simultaneously with the July 22 parliamentary elections, unlikely because of the current 120-day waiting period required before such a change can be sent to referendum. Nonetheless, AKP sees its strategy as a win-win-win for the party:

--they are confronting head-on the problem the Constitutional Court created with its new quorum requirement, which makes it virtually impossible for parliament to elect any president;

--the notion of direct elections is extremely popular, even if the hoped-for July date slips; and

--an AKP candidate is likely to do well in direct elections.

AKP can take credit for working hard to give the vote to the people and for continuing to stand up for functioning democracy. It's a strategy, though, designed to ratchet up, rather than ease Turkey's tense political atmosphere. End summary and comment.

¶3. (C) The parliamentary process to elect a new president collapsed when the Constitutional Court mandated a 367 quorum, impossible for almost any parliament to achieve. In its wake, AKP dusted off a two-year old opposition Motherland Party (Anavatan) proposal to change the constitution to allow for direct popular election of the president. With Anavatan's support, the package was approved by 370 votes on May 10. It includes:

--popular election of the president in a two-stage election, with a maximum of two five-year terms;

--reduction of the parliamentary term of office from five to four years; and

--reassertion of a one-third quorum requirement under the constitution.

It does not include a scaling back of presidential powers which many say is needed for a shift to direct elections because of the lack of time for full debate. If the president, as expected, vetoes the package, PM Erdogan intends to keep parliament in session long enough to re-pass it and send it back to Sezer. At that point, he would have to sign it or could send it to referendum. He could only refer it to the Constitutional Court for procedural -- not content -- reasons.

¶4. (C) AKP contacts, some of whom were initially hesitant, have now bought into their party's argument that, even if the package is imperfect, it is the only democratic way forward. AKP MP Murat Mercan would have preferred more time to debate the changes but said the Constitutional Court's quorum ruling forced the issue. The Court ruling eviscerates the parliamentary procedure used for the past three elections, AKP whip Eyup Fatsa told us, who also sees the amendments as the only way to strengthen Turkey's democracy. AKP's united front in parliament on the amendments shows the issue is helping members regroup after the divisions caused by the party's handling of the presidential election.

¶5. (C) Fatma Sahin, AKP deputy from Gaziantep, said the party

ANKARA 00001180 002 OF 002

decided to pursue direct presidential elections to "let the people decide". She blamed the current crisis on Turkey's tradition of trusting the state, not the people. "The July 22 elections will be a direct struggle between people power and state power," she explained. In a full democracy, Sahin said, the boundaries between institutions are clear; AKP's efforts to clarify the duties of the military and politicians makes Turkey's traditional power centers uncomfortable. The new parliament's composition will determine whether AKP can control the parliamentary presidential election process or push through a referendum on direct elections. "If we can't trust the people, whom should we trust?" Sahin asked.

¶6. (C) Opposition MPs see AKP's enthusiasm for direct elections as a disingenuous campaign tactic. Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Deniz Baykal said publicly that the proposals could not be taken seriously, terming direct elections "irresponsibility at its peak". CHP Whip Ali Topuz questioned AKP's motives, noting AKP would have raised it sooner if the change were really needed. "AKP's aim is to elect the next president," he told us flatly, something the CHP will not allow. He saw little chance of a referendum on July 22, if only because a 120-day waiting period is required once legislation has been submitted to referendum.

¶7. (C) CHP is challenging the legality of holding the referendum after the current parliament adjourns in late May. CHP MP Orhan Eraslan suggested the amendments may be shelved indefinitely by the new president or the new parliament. Topuz also predicted that the next parliament will decide whether to proceed with the referendum. If it is held and the people approve the change, the new system would govern the 2014 presidential election, he said. That would leave time for full debate and analysis of the impact on Turkey's existing divisions of power. "This is not a change that should be made in haste," Topuz stated.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON